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Message Text

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NEA:ALATHERTON, JR
NEA/EX:JCONNOLLY
---------- 064091
O 172228Z SEP 76
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 231127

EXDIS, FOR LANE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, AEMR, PINS, MILI, LE

SUBJECT: EVACUATION PLANNING

REF: BEIRUT 7154

1. WE ACCEPT MOST OF YOUR REASONING IN REFTEL. OUR JUDG-
MENT HERE IS THAT THERE WOULD BE FOUR MAJOR SITUATIONS
WHICH WOULD POSSIBLY REQUIRE YOU TO EVACUATE OR UNDER SOME
RATHER UNLIKELY CONDITIONS MOVE TEMPORARILY TO A BEIRUT
SAFE-HAVEN (E.G., CORAL BEACH HOTEL) BEFORE PROCEEDING
ONWARD TO DAMASCUS. THE FOUR SITUATIONS WOULD BE:

(A) A MAJOR CHRISTIAN MILITARY ONSLAUGHT ON WEST BEIRUT,
INVOLVING THE SPREAD OF COMBAT OPERATIONS TO THE IMMEDIATE
VICINITY OF THE CHANCERY;
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(B) A CHRISTIAN ATTACK FROM HADATH AIMED AT TAKING THE AIRPORT AND CUTTING THE KHALDE ROAD WHICH, IF SUCCESSFUL, WOULD LEAVE WEST BEIRUT ENCIRCLED;

(C) DETERIORATING LIVING CONDITIONS IN WHICH THE EMBASSY'S WATER AND GENERATOR FUEL SUPPLIES APPROACHED, FOR EXAMPLE, THE FIVE-DAY MARK WITH NO RELIEF IN SIGHT;

(D) AN EROSION OF THE AUTHORITY OF THOSE ELEMENTS EXERCISING SOME DEGREE OF SECURITY SUPERVISION IN WEST BEIRUT (PLO/FATAH/PASC/LAA).

2. IN OUR VIEW, SITUATION (D)--EROSION OF SECURITY AUTHORITY--WOULD BE PARTICULARLY DANGEROUS SINCE PROTECTION/ESCORT SERVICES COULD NOT BE GUARANTEED FOR ANY EVACUATION OR SAFEHAVEN MOVE, INCLUDING HELICOPTER EVACUATION. SUCH EROSION MIGHT BE DIFFICULT TO DETECT. IN THIS REGARD, THE DEPARTMENT AS WELL AS THE EMBASSY WILL HAVE TO REMAIN ALERT TO INDICATIONS, FROM INTELLIGENCE AND OTHER SOURCES, OF DISSENT OR A POWER STRUGGLE WITHIN PLO REACHING POINT WHERE IT COULD PRODUCE A MUCH LESS COOPERATIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD USG PERSONNEL.

3. LEBANON SAFEHAVENS: YOUR REPORT REINFORCES OUR OWN JUDGMENT THAT THE DISADVANTAGES AND RISKS OF MOVING TO A SAFEHAVEN AND STAYING THERE ARE SO GREAT AS TO BE VIRTUALLY UNACCEPTABLE. YOU SHOULD THEREFORE THINK PRIMARILY IN TERMS OF PARTIAL, STAGED, OR TOTAL EVACUATION, GOING TO THE CORAL BEACH HOTEL, FOR EXAMPLE, AFTER FIGHTING BREAKS OUT IN HOTEL DISTRICT, ONLY UNTIL ESCORT TO DAMASCUS IS ARRANGED.

4. LOCAL EMPLOYEES. WE AGREE YOU WILL HAVE TO PROTECT LOCAL EMPLOYEES AND TAKE SOME WITH YOU IN ANY EVACUATION. KEEP US INFORMED OF EXACT NUMBER LIKELY TO BE INVOLVED. WE ALSO WONDER, HOWEVER, WHETHER PLO/FATAH, WHOSE COOPERATION WOULD BE ESSENTIAL, WOULD ALLOW LEBANESE CITIZENS TO ACCOMPANY AMERICAN PERSONNEL, ALTHOUGH LEBANESE CITIZENS ARE TRAVELING TO DAMASCUS EVERY DAY. IF THERE WOULD BE A PROBLEM IN A CONVOY, PERHAPS YOU WILL HAVE TO CON-

SIDER GETTING THESE EMPLOYEES BACK TO CHRISTIAN-CONTROLLED LEBANON (UNDER PLO/FATAH ESCORT IF POSSIBLE) BEFORE FULL EVACUATION OF AMERICANS HAS TO BE CONDUCTED.

5. AMERICAN COMMUNITY: WE HAVE CONDUCTED TWO MAJOR EVACUATIONS OF THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY THIS YEAR; ON THE LAST OCCASION, WE MADE CLEAR IT WOULD BE THE LAST SUCH EVACUATION. AT THAT TIME A MAJOR CONSIDERATION IN

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DECIDING TO KEEP THE EMBASSY OPEN WITH A LEAN STAFF WAS THAT THE REMAINING PERSONNEL COULD BE BROUGHT OUT AT SHORT NOTICE WITH A MINIMUM OF DIFFICULTY WITHOUT RPT WITHOUT PRIVATE AMERICAN CITIZENS OR OTHER NATIONALS. IT MAY BE THAT IN ANY TOTAL EVACUATION YOU CONDUCT, PRIVATE U.S. CITIZENS WILL WANT TO GO ALONG ALSO, AND YOU WILL HAVE TO DO YOUR BEST TO TAKE THEM ALONG. OUR VIEW, HOWEVER, IS THAT YOU WILL NOT HAVE MUCH TIME BETWEEN CLEAR PERCEPTION OF UNACCEPTABLE DANGER AND DECISION TO

EVACUATE, WHICH OF COURSE ALSO COMPLICATES PROBLEM OF HANDLING LOCAL EMPLOYEES.

6. HUNKERING DOWN: PARA 3 OF REFTEL INDICATES, IN THE ABSENCE OF 12 HOURS ADVANCE NOTICE OF ATTACK THROUGH HOTEL DISTRICT, EMBASSY PERSONNEL MAY HAVE TO HUNKER DOWN UNTIL A CEASEFIRE OR VICTORY BY ONE SIDE OR ANOTHER. WE HOPE YOU WILL BE GIVEN ADEQUATE WARNING, AND WE ARE CLOSELY MONITORING ALL INTELLIGENCE WITH THIS IN MIND. IF THE FIGHTING CATCHES THE EMBASSY BY SURPRISE, OUR VIEW IS THAT YOU SHOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF FIRST LULL IN FIGHTING OR ARTILLERY SHELLING AND EVACUATE ALL PERSONNEL UNDER PLO/ FATAH/LAA ESCORT.

7. OPTIONS: UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES ENVISAGED, EVACUATIONS BY HELICOPTER OR BY U.S. NAVAL SHIP ARE NOT THE BEST OPTIONS. AT LEAST 72 HOURS AND PERHAPS LONGER WOULD BE REQUIRED TO SET UP SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT. IT WOULD REQUIRE THE COOPERATION OF THE FORCES IN THE IMMEDIATE VICINITY OF THE CHANCERY AS WELL AS AROUND EMBARKATION POINTS AND THIS MIGHT NOT BE POSSIBLE UNDER SITUATIONS (A) AND (D) LISTED ABOVE. WE WILL, HOWEVER, KEEP SUCH OPTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION.

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8. AT THIS TIME, WE PREFER THAT YOU PLAN FOR AND EXERCISE THE FOLLOWING EVACUATION OPTIONS:

(A) SENDING OUT UP TO THREE GROUPS OF EVACUEES (INCLUDING FSLS) OVER STAGED INTERVALS UNDER PLO/FATAH ESCORT TO DAMASCUS.

(B) ALL-AT-ONCE EVACUATION BY ROAD CONVOY TO DAMASCUS, POSSIBLY IN COOPERATION WIHT OTHER EMBASSIES, WITH PLO/FATAH ESCORT.

9. IF POSSIBLE, EMBASSY SHOULD LEAVE BEHIND A CARETAKER FORCE OF APPROPRIATE LOCAL EMPLOYEES. IF NOT, YOU ARE AUTHORIZED TO CONTRACT WITH BEIRUT EXPRESS FOR THIS SER-

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VICE. REALISTICALLY, WE PROBABLY COULD NOT EXPECT ANOTHER EMBASSY TO ASSUME OBLIGATIONS OF A PROTECTING POWER, ALTHOUGH WE ARE GIVING SOME FURTHER THOUGHT HERE TO SOUNDING OUT EGYPTIANS.

10. OUR BASIC VIEW IS THAT YOU SHOULD EVACUATE WHILE PLO/FATAH PROTECTION AND ESCORT SERVICES ARE STILL POSSIB AND AVAILABLE.

11. YOU SHOULD FEEL NO HESITATION IN COMMUNICATING ANY CONCERNS YOU MAY DEVELOP ABOUT SUDDEN TURNS OF EVENTS OR

A MORE INSIDIOUS DETERIORATION OF THE SITUATION. ALSO KEEP US INFORMED OF WHAT ACTIONS OTHER FRIENDLY EMBASSIES ARE TAKING (E.G., UK EMBASSY SENDING SOME LOCAL EMPLOYEES ON LEAVE BEGINNING SEPT 6), SINCE THIS WOULD BE FACTOR IN OUR DECISIONS. YOU MUST SEEK SPECIFIC WASHINGTON APPROVAL BY FLASH CABLE BEFORE ACTING ON EVACUATION. WE ARE PREPARED TO ACT INSTANTLY ON FLASH CABLE REPORTING YOUR JUDGMENT THAT EVACUATION IS REQUIRED.

12. SECRETARY APPROVED FOREGOING. ROBINSON

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